

know the judges are going to be back in and have been back in to try and request this, how can we justify not providing them the same level of benefit as the teachers? And that has been the real reason a lot of us have risen in opposition. Where do you draw the line? Why do we make the exception to the teacher? And I think, obviously, there is a strong case. The teachers work hard, 35 years is a long time, but in my opinion, the better way to provide benefits to the teachers is through salary enhancements and other types of retirement changes that we have made. The biggest change in retirement benefits to the teachers is a bill I introduce and got passed in 1983, LB 457, which changed dramatically the benefit level for teachers at that time, and in some cases tripled and quadrupled retirement benefits for longtime teachers. It was a fair and reasonable change and that one I supported wholeheartedly and was glad to see changed. We have some buy back provisions, again trying to help teachers that are unfairly burdened with low retirement benefits, and there is another bill, LB 879, which I and Senator Morehead have co-introduced, to help teachers that are already retired with 25 years of service out there receiving \$155 a month, 25 years of service, \$155 a month. We would like to raise that all the way up to \$250 a month. Incredible how cheap we have been to some of our teachers. There is no doubt about it, they deserve better, but in my estimation, that makes more sense, is more just, is more fair and equitable than the proposal before us today. It is sort of like meat and potatoes versus the gravy and the sweets. This is the gravy. This is the sweets that some people would like to have, the early retirement benefit. In my estimation, it isn't the guts of a good retirement plan. It is an enhancement. It is nice but it is not absolutely necessary to have, and so I say that we have many other needs out there greater than that, and one of them being salary enhancements for teachers. They are underpaid woefully. If you increase their salaries dramatically, you have a corresponding increase in their retirement benefits because salaries do impact under the formula of retirement benefits. So part of the problem with our poor retirement benefits is our poor salaries. As Senator Johnson talked about, we are already subsidizing heavily retirement benefits for school employees. Now that was fought again by Senator Johnson and myself, Senator Landis and some others here, and we lost, but we did provide a dramatic improvement in early retirement benefits...

SPEAKER BARRETT: One minute.